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White Pines Forest

STATE PARK

CONSERVATION

THE PARK

White Pines Forest State Park, in northwestern Illinois, is in Ogle County about 8 miles west of Oregon and 12 miles north of Dixon. During pioneers days the blacktop road forming the south boundary of the 385-acre park was the old Chicago-Iowa Trail, for years the principal route east and west across this part of the state.

While developing the park for the visitor's recreational use, the state has preserved its native charm and protected the virgin pine stand, the southern-most of its kind in the midwest.

HISTORY

Early Ogle County settlers found this forest along the east bank of Pine Creek extending back a quarter of a mile and covering an area of 700 acres. With a view toward preserving Illinois' last stand of white pines for future generations, a movement to set aside the area as a state park was started in the early part of the twentieth century.

Through efforts of Ogle County nature lovers, a bill appropriating $30,000 for purchase of the land was passed by the legislature in 1903, but the measure was vetoed. It was not until 1927 that the forest was acquired for a state park.

Early War Area: The vicinity of White Pines Forest State Park, in the heart of the Black Hawk country, is rich in historic associations with the brave warrior who resisted for so long the efforts of the white man to drive his people from their beloved Rock River Valley.

One important engagement in the Black Hawk War, fought above Dixon in May, 1832, resulted in the complete rout of poorly-disciplined volunteers under the command of Governor John Reynolds. Eventually, however, the Indians were driven from the Rock River country and Black Hawk was sent into exile in the custody of his hatred rival Keokuk.

Story of the Pines: The pines once dominated vast regions of North America and have occupied a unique place in American history. A forest of white pines greeted the Pilgrims when they landed at Plymouth Rock. Massachusetts used wooden money (shillings) in early days, not only made from the white pine, but also stamped with its figure. The first houses in America, of which we have any record, were constructed of white pine.

The utility of the white pine has worked its own ruin, for it was useful in all kinds of construction from masts of ships to matches. Its tall trunks made it invaluable for lumber for all purposes.

The white pine forest has also been considered the ideal place for people suffering from lung disease. The Indians valued the white pine for its many medical uses. The inner bark was used in the treatment of many lung ailments. Long before the Turkish bath became popular, the Indian used pine twigs for his medical sweat bath.

THE NATURAL SCENE

Most of the park is an ideal habitat for the white pines. Moss-covered cliffs, decorated with trailing vines, are mingled with many hardwoods such as maple, ash, elk, oak, basswood, and hickory. Bright blossoming flowers include trout lily, Solomon's seal, bloodroot, blue-eyed grass, spring beauty, and hepatica. Many common species of fur-bearing animals and birds can be viewed in the varied topography of the park. Red squirrels, raccoon, opossum, and chipmunk range this territory. Among birds are the pine finch and pine warbler, and in the winter there are many northern species.

Because of the turbulent water in rainy weather, fords rather than bridges have been constructed along the roadway through the interior of the park.

FACILITIES

Picnicking — There are several picnic areas along Pine Creek with water, fireplaces, and tables. No cooking may be done except on park or camp stoves. Playground equipment is also available.

Camping — In addition to tent sites, the park offers a few trailer sites and a trailer disposal. Class C sites, with vehicular access, are available. The fee is based on one unit per site. All campers must obtain a permit from the park staff. Youth group camping is also available; all groups of 25 or more persons must have advance permission to enter the park. Soft ground and high water may close the campground. Check ahead with the park staff to be sure camping is open.

Winter Sports — Sledding on the rolling hills is a popular winter pastime. Cross-country skiing is also enjoyed.

Lodge and Cabins— The park lodge is open to the public from April 1 to November 1. Open on weekends in November — Closed December 1. The rustic lodge houses a lounge in one wing with appropriate colorful Indian work. The other wing houses an attractive dining room. Thirteen one-room log cabins and three four-room cabins, equipped with bath/showers, heat, and air conditioning are available for overnight visitors.

The lodge and cabins are operated on the European Plan

with the price of meals separate from the room rates. Reservations should be directed to the White Pines Forest Lodge, Mt. Morris, Illinois. Telephone 815/946-3817.

Hiking — Many miles of foot trails wind through the stand of virgin pines and along the crest of the bluff in the west end of the park.

LOWDEN NEARBY

On a bluff 12 miles northeast of the park is Lorado Taft's notable American Indian statue at Lowden State Park. The 48-foot high statue of a stern-visaged warrior peering out across the Rock River Valley is an idealization of the Indian race. The monument was unveiled in 1911.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Groups of 25 or more persons will not be admitted to any state site unless permission from the site superintendent has been obtained to use the facilities. In addition, groups of minors must have adequate supervision and at least one responsible adult must accompany each group of 15 minors. All pets must be on a leash.

Numerous state sites are within easy access of every part of Illinois. Lodges, cabins, and dining rooms are important features of Illinois Beach, Starved Rock, Pere Marquette, and Giant City; White Pines Forest has cabins and dining rooms only. Reservations for lodging should be made with lodge managers.

Most state sites are open year-round, except on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. When weather conditions necessitate the closing of roads during freezing and thawing periods, access to facilities is by foot only.

For more details about this park, contact Site Superintendent, 6712 W. Pines Rd., Mt. Morris, IL 61054. Phone 815/946-3717.

For information on other sites, write Illinois Department of Conservation, 524 S. Second St., Springfield, Illinois 62706.

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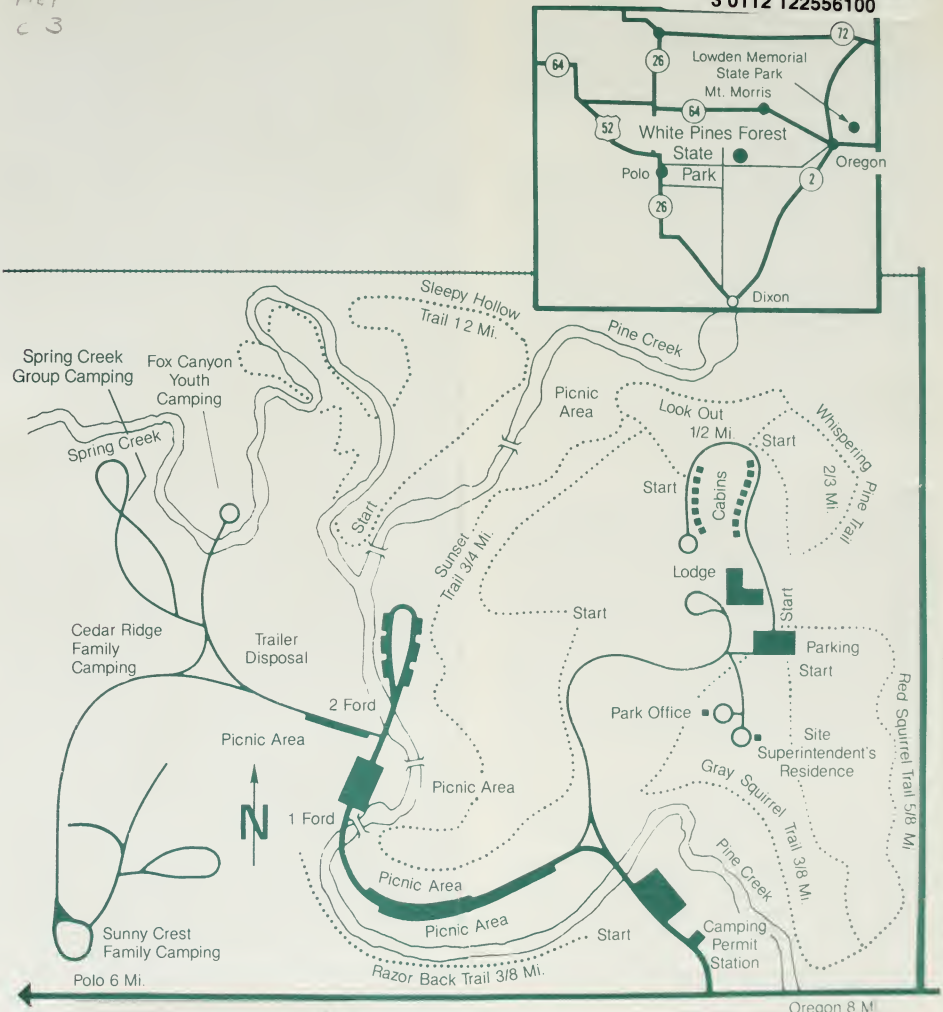

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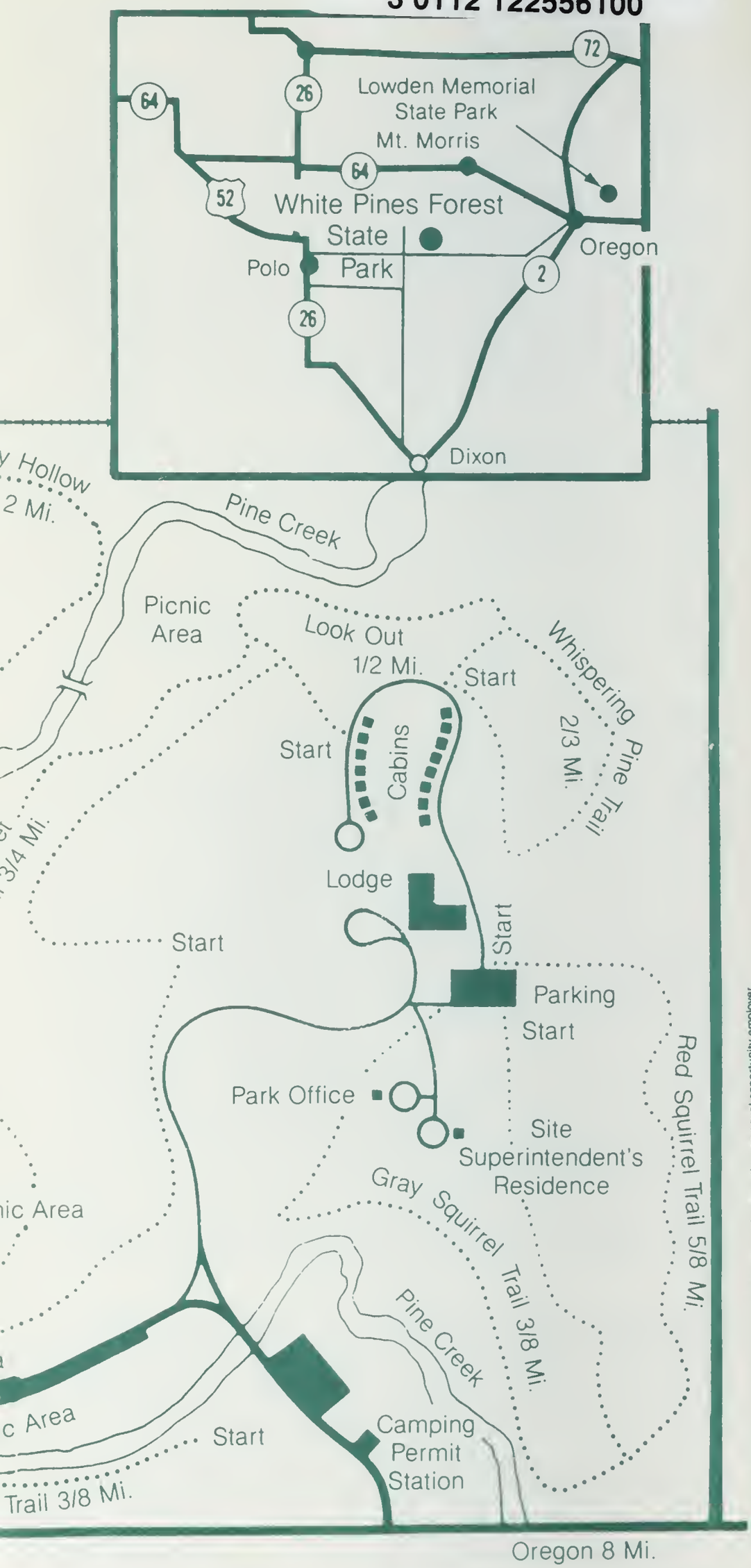

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